

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV, SHUM, RH, BC, SF, UK
SUBJECT: DEATH OF FOREIGNERS WHILE IN DETENTION

REF: (A) GABORONE 0896, (B) GABORONE 0890

1. WE NOTE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS CONTINUES TO HEADLINE STORIES CONCERNING THE DEATHS OF THREE MEN (2 SOUTH AFRICAN CITIZENS AND 1 UK CITIZEN) WHILE DETAINED BY BOTSWANA DEFENSE FORCE (REFTELS). PRESS ACCOUNTS HAVE EMPHASIZED A NUMBER OF DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN THE GOB VERSION OF EVENTS (REF A) AND THE STORIES OF "EYEWITNESSES". AMONG THE ALLEGED DISCREPANCIES ARE THE FOLLOWING:

A. GOB STATEMENT IMPLIES THAT POSSESSION BYDETAINEES OF VARIOUS ARMS AND AMMUNITION WAS EVIDENCE OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES. SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS ACCOUNTS STATE THAT THE WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION HELD BY DETAINEES WERE APPROPRIATE FOR THEIR WORK AS GAME RANGERS. NEITHER GOB'S STATEMENT NOR PRESS REPORTS ADDRESS QUESTION OF CONFIDENTIAL

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WHETHER CONFISCATED WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION WERE PROPERLY REGISTERED IN BOTSWANA.

B. ACCORDING TO GOB STATEMENT, AFTER OVERPOWERING GUARDS, TWO OF THE DETAINEES ATTEMPTED TO RUN AWAY WHILE THE THIRD POINTED WEAPON AT BDF TROOPS. SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS REPORTS ALLEGE THAT ONE OF THE DETAINEES WHO IS SAID TO HAVE RUN HAD RECENTLY BEEN IN MOTORCYCLE ACCI-

DENT AND WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN ABLE TO RUN AWAY AS ALLEGED BY BDF.

C. GOB'S STATEMENT SAYS THAT ONE SOUTH AFRICAN, MICHAEL ARDEN, AND UK CITIZEN NICHOLAS LOVE WERE ARRESTED MARCH 28. ACCORDING TO SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS, "OTHER VERSIONS" SAY THAT ALL WERE FIRST DETAINED MARCH 29.

2. UNDER PRESSURE FROM FAMILIES OF DEAD SOUTH AFRICANS, SAG FOREIGN MINISTER PIK BOTHA REPORTEDLY STATED THAT SAG WAS NOT SATISFIED WITH GOB EXPLANATIONS AND WOULD PRESS FOR COMPLETE INVESTIGATION. UK HIGH COMMISSION IN GABORONE IS ALSO UNDER CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE GENERATED BY FAMILY OF DECEASED UK CITIZEN NICHOLAS LOVE AND QUESTIONS RAISED ABOUT INCIDENT IN UK PARLIAMENT. UK HICOM TURNER TOLD ME APRIL 3 THAT HE WAS AWAITING PROPER MOMENT TO DISCUSS INCIDENT DIRECTLY WITH PRESIDENT KHAMA IN VIEW OF WHAT HE CONSIDERED UNSYMPATHETIC AND UNHELPFUL ATTITUDE OF SECRETARY TO CABINET STEENKAMP. TURNER TOLD ME THAT, AS A MINIMUM, GOB SHOULD VOICE REGRET AT LOVE'S DEATH WHILE IN DETENTION.

3. UK EMBOFF TOLD US APRIL 5 THAT AUTOPSY REPORT PROMISED BY BOG HAS NOT BEEN RECEIVED AND THAT NO RESPONSE HAS BEEN RECEIVED TO REPEATED REQUESTS BY UK HICOM THAT FORMAL INQUEST BE HELD. ACCORDING TO UK EMBOFF, NICHOLAS LOVE'S PARENTS ARE NOW IN JOHANNESBURG, AND FATHER IS CONFIDENTIAL

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EXPECTED TO VISIT BOTSWANA TO PERSONALLY INQUIRE INTO CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS SON'S DEATH.

4. IN ABSENCE OF BDF COMMANDER MERAFFE, AND AS INDICATION OF CONCERN FOR SECURITY OF AMERICANS, I DISCUSSED INCIDENT APRIL 4 WITH BDF DEPUTY COMMANDER BRIGADIER IAN KHAMA, SON OF PRESIDENT KHAMA. HE REFERRED TO DEATHS AS "ISOLATED INCIDENT" WHICH OCCURRED NOT BECAUSE OF ALLEGED ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES BY DETAINEES BUT BECAUSE THEY ATTACKED THEIR GUARDS AND ATTEMPTED TO ESCAPE. "THIS PUTS THE ENTIRE AFFAIR IN DIFFERENT LIGHT", HE SAID. KHAMA EMPHASIZED THAT INCIDENT DOES NOT REFLECT CHANGE OF BDF POLICY EITHER WITH REGARD TO HANDLING OF DETAINEES OR PATTERNS OF BDF ACTIVITIES, NOTING BDF DOES NOT PATROL RELATIVELY QUIET TULI BLOCK AREA. HE REAFFIRMED THAT FREEDOM OF TRAVEL BY FOREIGNERS IN BORDER AREA IS UNCHANGED AND SUGGESTED THAT WE CHECK WITH BDF IF WE HAVE SPECIFIC SECURITY QUESTIONS IN FUTURE. WITH REGARD TO CURRENT INCIDENT, KHAMA SAID SKEPTICAL PUBLIC REACTION WAS UNDERSTANDABLE, AND HE INVITED US TO SUBMIT LIST OF SPECIFIC QUESTIONS WHICH WE WANTED ANSWERED.

5. COMMENT: WE SHARE UK HICOM'S SKEPTICISM OVER GOB EXPLANATIONS OF INCIDENT AND BELIEVE THAT EVERY EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO DETERMINE THE FACTS. EMBOFF HAS APRIL 6 APPOINTMENT WITH DEPUTY POLICE MOPHUTING, WHO IS REPORTEDLY CONDUCTING GOB'S INVESTIGATION, AND THEN I MAY SEE BDF COMMANDER GENERAL MERAFFE WHEN HE RETURNS APRIL 7. MEANWHILE PRESSURE IS LIKELY TO BUILD ON GOB TO ACKNOWLEDGE MISTAKES IN ITS HANDLING OF INCIDENT OR AT LEAST ISSUE NEW PUBLIC STATEMENT TO SUPPLEMENT ITS INITIAL RELEASE.

NORLAND

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